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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS
1942

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†"Janie" opened Thursday, September 10th, at the Henry Miller Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

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"Janie"

NEW YORK TIMES
September 11, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Janie"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

FURTHER attention is called to the frightful problems of being young in an amusing comedy entitled "Janie," which was acted at Henry Miller's last evening. Josephine Bentham and Herschel Williams have written it under the impression that girls in their teens are excitable and irresponsible and boys of the same age have expansive natures. On the whole, this impression seems to be sound. For "Janie" is a pleasant bit of harum-scarum merriment, brightly acted by Gwen Anderson, a talented young lady from Iowa, and an able company from distant corners of Broadway.

If there had never been a "Junior Miss" to describe the crises of girls who are just old enough to put their hair up or down, or both, which is most likely, it would be possible to write about "Janie" with more surprise and enthusiasm. In the new comedy the girls are also three in number, if you ignore a frill or two who mince and giggle on the outskirts, and one of the three has a comic voice of low timbre. If you have left your heart at the "Junior Miss" canteen you can hardly avoid raising your eyebrows and making comparisons.

• • •

Especially when the evening gets older that is not altogether fair to "Janie," which has a theatre formula of its own and a good many traps for laughter. It relates the story of how Janie and her two pals throw a secret party for a few soldiers from a neighboring camp and draw practically a regiment. If Janie's father and mother had known she was entertaining the Army, the climax of the evening might not have been so devastating. But even the best behaved soldiers leave an impression on a room where they have been having a good time. When Janie's mother and father barge home into the midst of a military fracas Janie has a lot to account for.

"Janie" lacks the topsy-turvy psychology of "Junior Miss." It lacks the adolescent daze. But it fools around amiably with puppy love, which is an amusing topic when it can be viewed objectively on the stage. And it presents one triumphant character — little Elsbeth. Elsbeth must be about six years of age. She is a skinny wretch, played with a squeaky voice and alarming persistence by Clare Foley, and she sets a high price on her nuisance value. She will not leave the room for less than five cents. She sees all, hears all and tells all with malicious distortion. At the most inconvenient times she struggles to stand on her head, thus displaying the utilitarian nature of her underthings.

She also draws attention to herself through mendacity. "Once I grew four inches in a week," she reports to a stranger as she skips coyly around the room. Elsbeth is an excellent contribution to the theatre's gallery of dreadful people. This is the most original item "Janie" has to contribute to Gotham's slowly awakening sense of humor.

Under Antoinette Perry's direction the play has been staged in a spirit of workmanlike good nature. As Janie, Miss Anderson gives a bounding and imaginative performance in a part that needs resourceful treatment and gets it. Frank Amy brings a comic and nasal boorishness and belligerence to the part of a high school swain. Betty Breckenridge and Margaret Wallace play two other young things agreeably, and Herbert Evers acts the part of a soldier who has recently escaped from Yale.

Linda Watkins has one particularly enjoyable scene as a midget-minded widow on the loose; she gives the play a perceptible lift in the first act when the stage is pretty well cluttered with detail. As the two men of middle years, Maurice Manson on the bustling, fatuous side and Howard St. John on the side of worldly assurance, give satisfactory performances. Without knocking itself out with brilliance or originality, "Janie" knows how to laugh in the right theatrical places.

NEW YORK POST
September 11, 1942

"Janie" a Merry Comedy of Flaming Youth, 1942 Brand

By WILELLA WALDORF

BROCK PEMBERTON gave the new Broadway theatrical season a refreshing injection of comedy last night at Henry Miller's Theatre.

"Janie," the new play by Josephine Bentham and Herschel Williams which Mr. Pemberton is sponsoring, concerns itself with young people in their teens, and although Janie and her pals are two or three years older than the adolescents in "Junior Miss," one is inevitably reminded of that work at various points during the performance.

Never precisely overwhelmed by the virtues of "Junior Miss" as an example of stagecraft, this reviewer found "Janie" on the whole a more satisfactory comedy. There isn't anything startlingly original in what passes for plot in plays of this kind, but the authors of "Janie" have turned out a workmanlike script which is acted with great charm by a group of fetching young people enlisted by Mr. Pemberton for the occasion, and Antoinette Perry's smooth direction keeps it flowing along at just the proper pace.

The Army Moves In

"Janie" also has the advantage of timeliness. No doubt we shall be deluged before long with plays about volunteer war workers and towns located near Army camps, but the martial theme is very much up to the minute and the picture Miss Bentham and Mr. Williams have drawn of what happens when a cavalcade of exuberant young fellows in uniform meets a bevy of high school young ladies whose parents are the worrying type has some very merry repercussions in the town of Hortonville.

The fun starts in the Colburn household when Mrs. Lawrence, a flirtatious Southern widow, arrives for a visit with her son Dick, stationed at the nearby Army camp. The doting mother, having haunted New Haven during Dick's two years at Yale, bids fair to follow him even into the trenches, but is fortunately sidetracked by a susceptible bachelor who is also a guest at the Colburns.

When Janie and Dick and a few of their friends get together for a little innocent fun while their elders are dining at the country club, the party gets a little out of hand. The plot is also complicated to a degree by Janie's seven-year-old sister, Elsbeth, an enterprising child with an inventive mind and a genius for making a nuisance of herself.

Some Charming Young Actors

Gwen Anderson, who makes her Broadway debut in the title role, performs delightfully as the high school senior who has seen very little of the world but considers herself highly sophisticated. Herbert Evers as the young man who left Yale to join the Army likewise gives a persuasive performance, and the stage is crowded with a horde of merry young people most of the evening.

Particularly do we remember Frank Amy's ingratiating impersonation of a home town youth named Scooper Nolan who was Janie's boy friend until the Army moved in, and Betty Breckenridge as the girl whose shrill giggle rent the air at the slightest provocation. Clare Foley plays the obnoxious seven-year-old with aplomb.

The elders, in a play devoted to the 1942 brand of flaming youth, were necessarily more or less in the background, but Linda Watkins managed to be pretty amusing as the Kentucky widow. John Root provided the tasteful settings.

Mr. Pemberton, it will be recalled, once produced a huge success called "Strictly Dishonorable." We rather imagine he has struck a new gold mine with "Janie."

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
September 11, 1942

Janie Is Presented By Brock Pemberton

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH Janie contains its good, round laughs, I am afraid it is a Junior Miss which belongs in the misses' department. It is a wild but mild little wartime comedy, fought on the adolescent front, which Herschel Williams and Josephine Bentham have fashioned from a novel by Miss Bentham. It huffs and it puffs, but it does not blow the house down—at least often enough.

Its complications, which are many, arise when the 16-year-old daughter of a small-town editor gives a party in her home for the soldiers from a nearby camp. Her father has come out editorially against the young girls of his township mixing with the troops. Of course, it is without his knowledge that the party is given. Yet, as also goes without saying, the brawl thrown by Janie—the young girl very much in question—ends up by winning for her father the new presses he has desired, in spite of priorities. Everything ends up happily on the far side of the footlights.

• • •

Please note that so far as the footlights are concerned I have carefully specified the far side. It is one of the tragedies of the theater that endings, supposedly happy for the characters on stage, are not necessarily happy for the audience. Spectators and characters can live in different worlds. The only happy endings in the truest sense, whether the play be tragic or gay, serious or mad, are those which, until the very moment that they have come about, have found the audience and the actors living in the same world.

Last night at the Henry Miller's I, at least, found it hard to become a full-time citizen of Hortonville. I sat before the comedy not as a resident but as a transient. When a little brat as well written and as well played as Clare Foley's diabolical Elsbeth demonstrated her nuisance value or young Frank Amy barked his puppy love fetchingly; when Linda Watkins first entered as a friend of Janie's mother and the Southern mother of the Yale private who was to cause Janie's heart to flutter, or when the evening's better lines (and very funny ones they were occasionally) put in their appearance, I felt the pleasures of being included in the comedy.

• • •

Perhaps if the Janie of Gwen Anderson, though poiseful enough, had been less whiney; perhaps if the comedy's machinery had not sounded so much like buzz-saws working overtime, and certainly if the script and the performance had lived up to the better gags I might be able to salute Janie as the hit I should have liked to have seen it be. Yet, as presented, I must report regretfully that Brock Pemberton's first offering of the season is on the tepid side. More accurately, it resembles a cold tub into which hot water drops fitfully from a broken shower above.

Although Janie has its two-generation plots and counterplots, its hearty laughs and its fearfully lean scenes, and at one point almost as many soldiers as the Stage Door Canteen, what it really seems to prove (if anything) is that, though boys of 16 are difficult enough, giggly girls of the same vintage are more difficult still. I discovered that I aged uncomfortably as the evening went on and on. It was not that my hair grew grayer. It was merely that my interest paled —again and again and again.

"Janie"

NEW YORK SUN
September 11, 1942

'Janie,' a Small and Pleasant Comedy, Opens At Henry Miller's Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

PROBABLY it will be easy this season to enjoy giddy little plays like "Janie," which opened last evening at Henry Miller's Theater; probably it had better be, since they are apt to be numerous. Like "Janie," they will be intended to take the mind off all serious matters. If they succeed as well as, by and large, "Janie" succeeds the mind is going to have itself quite a time bouncing amid soap bubbles.

"Janie," which Josephine Bentham and Herschel Williams contrived, has a foolish juvenile charm of its own. Its heroine is a high school girl who has a beau named Scooper and meets a handsome soldier and is somewhat swept off her feet. Father fumes and mother chides, but Janie and her friends go their exuberant way and have a party, which is attended by a couple of hundred soldiers, who come in jeeps and drink up all father's bourbon and get locked in bathrooms. Eventually father gets arrested and speaks sternly to a colonel, and Janie's little sister—a charming brat—is lost and found again and Janie, although devoted in a general way to the army, finds that old loves are best.

This isn't, if you stop to think of it, much of a story to tell in three acts. But it seems to be almost enough. The authors have brought in all those things which are always funny in plays about the very young—the comical schoolmate who is blankly ingenuous, the little sister who has to be paid every few minutes to go away, the gawky adolescent who announces, at about the moment you expect, that he is forever through with women. You will recognize these things, sometimes a far off, but always with pleasure. Perhaps afterward you will try, with no great success, to remember just what it was you laughed at, and even while you are laughing you may sometimes wonder. But you will be, generally, pleased with "Janie."

Several sub-plots, one of which obscurely concerns a printing press, are dragged through by their heels. Mature love intrudes from time to time and there are moments when the grown-ups are, perhaps, a shade too obvious and evidently no brighter than they should be. These things don't matter a great deal, however. Brock Pemberton's young cast is cheerfully adept and things move briskly. Gwen Anderson is a pretty flutter of amusement in the title role, Betty Breckenridge is droll and Frank Amy is comical; tiny Clare Foley, playing the brat sister, is almost alarmingly fascinating. The elders, particularly Linda Watkins, also behave well.

A relaxing sort of little play, "Janie" is.

'JANIE'

A comedy in three acts by Josephine Bentham and Herschel Williams; directed by Antoinette Perry; settings by John Root; presented at Henry Miller's Theater on September 10, 1942, by Brock Pemberton. The cast:

Charles Colburn	Maurice Manson
Elsbeth Colburn	Clare Foley
Lucille Colburn	Nancy Cushman
Rodney	John Marriott
John Van Brunt	Howard St. John
Janie Colburn	Gwen Anderson
Bernadine Dodd	Betty Breckenridge
Paula Rainey	Margaret Wallace
Scooper Nolan	Frank Amy
Thelma Lawrence	Linda Watkins
Dick Lawrence	Herbert Evers
Tina	Artiebell McGinty
Andy	Michael St. Angel
Frank	Franklin Kline
Oscar	Paul Wilson
Hortense Bennington	Gertrude Beach
"Dead-Pan" Hackett	Blaine Fillmore
Carl Loomis	J. Franklin Jones
Joe Jerome	Nicky Raymond
Mickey Malone	Kenneth Tobey
Uncle Poodgie	W. O. McWatters

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
September 11, 1942

'Janie,' New Comedy At the Henry Miller

Brock Pemberton Farce Describes Fun Near Average Army Camp

By JOHN ANDERSON

BROCK PEMBERTON and Antoinette Perry are two of the theatre's noblest war workers and whenever a sailor comes ashore or a soldier comes to town they are among the first to cheer the visitors up and beg them to feel at home. Wherever committees gather to discuss some fresh hospitality for the men at arms Mr. Pemberton and Miss Perry are always there, and if invention lags they may be found washing dishes at the Stage Door Canteen, so anxious are they to ease the burdens of the Army, the Navy, and the Marines.

Their enthusiasm for such admirable war work led them, however, to present at Henry Miller's Theatre last night a willing but wabbly little comedy called "Janie" by Josephine Bentham and Herschel Williams. In it the authors prove how wonderful it is to entertain the soldiers and the sailors, and while I heartily agree with the sentiments of the play I found myself wishing that it also included somewhat more definitely the matter of entertaining the playgoers.

Funny Situations

Miss Bentham and Mr. Williams dump their material on the stage as loosely as if it were a load of gravel, and then raise hopes high by snatching out of the pile funny lines and situations that seem to be so many gold nuggets. The supply begins to run out in the second act, and the third has scarcely a glitter.

To identify the comedy quickly the lobby wags were calling it "Junior Missed," a descriptive but slightly unfair label since "Janie" had some scatter-brained humor to recommend it before it went quietly to pieces. Though the dialogue suggested that it had been put together with paper clips it was undeniably funny in spots, and its sketch of a ruthless little girl who blackmailed her sister's boy friend out of nickels to get rid of her, had the elements of both fun and horrid fascination.

This awful little creature infested the Colburn household in Hortonville, some average town in the U. S. near an Army camp. When Janie, her elder sister, threw a party for some of the soldiers while the grown-ups were at the country club there was hell to pay, since it seems that the boys ran jeeps up on the lawn, took up target practice back of the house, ransacked the old man's liquor closets. Janie's papa was a stuffed shirt editor of the town daily who didn't understand the Younger Generation, and when the disgraceful party caused so much pleasure in Washington that he is given priority on a new press, he began to see the light.

Scenes of Confusion

It is, of course, ye olde claptrap brought up to date with the war, and the flitter brained doings of Janie and her gang naturally bring up the comparison with "Junior Miss." But the play hasn't the steady comic sense of "Junior Miss," nor the shrewd observation, and nowhere near the writing ability. Most of the alleged adults in "Janie" seem to be accidental half-wits, and the plot machinery creaks badly.

With her usual talent for comic detail Miss Perry had directed it to get the most out of the rattlepated scenes of confusion and running around. Gwen Anderson, a pleasant newcomer to the stage, seems scarcely empty-headed enough for the title part, though the authors have not clarified the character much to help her out. Frank Amy is excellent as a local youth jilted by Janie for one of the soldiers, and since the authors have written the soldier as quite a Yale prig there isn't much Herbert Evers can do to humanize the portrait. Betty Breckenridge is amusing as Janie's foolish Fuffy, and Clare Foley plays the blackmailing brat with alarming boldness, but all of their efforts do not quite make a homey service comedy out of a sort of Broadway grab-bag.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
September 11, 1942

Juniors Meet the Army

By HOWARD BARNES

SMALL town comedy and Army camp shenanigans are neatly spliced in "Janie." The result is a show which gives the new season its first promise of the zest, craftsmanship and awareness on which it must inevitably count during the months to come. This Brock Pemberton production, which opened at Henry Miller's Theater last night, is nothing to make one throw one's hat in the air. The plot line is familiar. The characters are standard. But "Janie" is disarming, amusing and down to earth in its contemplation of the American scene.

The play will be compared inevitably with "Junior Miss." It has to do with high school youngsters and the curious teen-age pretensions to sophistication which are part and parcel of domestic farce. The fact remains that "Janie" owes no great debt to "Junior Miss," or any other comedy of its genre. It may employ a stock situation, but it works delightful variations on the theme. What with the acting of the younger members of the company, adroit staging and pleasant settings, it is a very human and humorous charade.

* * *

Josephine Bentham and Herschel Williams have been remarkably successful in tying in Army doings with small-town cut-ups. Without laboring the military aspects of the show, they have been able to crowd the stage with uniforms in the midst of a family fable. The adolescent heroine is never lost sight of, nor is her predatory small sister, who is forever demanding hush money. The gulf between two generations is depicted explicitly and amusingly, but always in terms of solid and satisfactory existence.

It is only a pity that the authors have not depended on a bit more substance in the unraveling of their lark than they have at Henry Miller's. Nearly all the events in the final scene of the play are telegraphed to the audience long before they occur. At this particular moment in a season which is still straining at a leash, it would perhaps be better to forget minor qualifications. On the whole, "Janie" is good fun.

* * *

There can be few qualifications about the juvenile performances in the offering. Gwen Anderson gives a deft and utterly persuasive portrayal of the title role. Her consternation, upon finding most of an Army camp in her family's home, in response to a reckless impulse, is beautifully modulated. Clare Foley plays the bribe-seeking younger sister with true brilliance; Herbert Evers is fine as the selectee who causes all the commotion, and Frank Amy's characterization of a high school youth in civilian clothes is nothing short of masterly. Antoinette Perry has used all her guile to keep the comedy spinning at top speed, and the John Root settings are in keeping with the mood of the piece. "Janie" is slight, but it is a happy augury for fall theatricals.